



# VITAL SOURCE

FALL 2013



**Darlene Chambers, Ph.D.,**  
*Executive Director*

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## OCCS sponsors 10 new schools

The Ohio Council of Community Schools (OCCS) welcomed 10 new charter schools to its portfolio for the 2013-14 school year.

They are:

- Akron Preparatory School, Akron, grades K-8
- Canton College Preparatory, Canton, grades K-8
- Dayton SMART Academy, Dayton, grades K-2
- The Knight Academy, Toledo, grades 4-8
- Mosaica Online of Ohio, Columbus, K-12
- Ohio Collegiate Academy, Cleveland area, grades K-5
- Provost Academy, Cleveland, grades 6-12
- STEAM Academy of Dayton, Dayton, grades K-8
- STEAM Academy of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, grades K-5
- STEAM Academy of Warrensville Heights, Warrensville Heights, grades K-5

The new partnerships commenced this past summer at OCCS' second annual new school orientation at the University of Toledo. The event aimed to introduce the new charter school leaders, board members, and key staff to OCCS staff members and provide them with an overview of the technical assistance and collaboration they can expect for the coming year. Speakers at the event included Amy Goodson, an attorney who focuses her practice in the area of charter governing boards, and Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti, Ph.D., interim dean of Judith Herb College of Education at the University of Toledo.

OCCS is excited to partner with a very diverse and innovative portfolio this year. Among its new school start-ups for the 2013-14 school year are two of the state's three new virtual schools. They are the first e-schools to open since the Ohio General Assembly put a moratorium on them in 2005. Those schools are Mosaica Online Academy of Ohio, a K-12 provider based in Columbus serving students statewide, and Provost Academy of Ohio, which will serve Ohio students in grades 6-12 and is based out of Cleveland. Unlike other brick-and-mortar charter

It's been a busy but exciting late summer and fall. OCCS opened nine new start-up charter schools, awarded its annual student postsecondary scholarships and new school technology grants, and developed a new application process for charter schools seeking renewal. I had the pleasure to complete the National Association for Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Leaders Program and also took on the presidency of the Ohio Association for Charter School Authorizers (OACSA). Ohio launched new report cards, which greatly increase expectations for schools, teachers, and students. And our own board of trustees launched a new vision statement which, while being succinct, powerfully captures the essence of the challenges and opportunities facing OCCS and its schools: **Advancing educational choice and achieving excellence through leadership and innovation.**



OCCS seeks to be a leader in the charter school movement, not only with the quality of our sponsored schools but in the way we do business and collaborate with partners in the community at large, in order to make an impact in Ohio and nationally when it comes to quality authorizing. It's one reason our board and internal leadership have prioritized strategic initiatives such as the scholarships for students seeking postsecondary training, and technology grants to new schools. We recognize the financial burdens imposed by college or workforce training, and also the underfunding for charter school start-ups who need technology to meet the needs of all learners. It's also why I'm able to be involved in advocacy – whether through my new position as OACSA President, the NACSA Leaders Program, or on the Cleveland Transformation Alliance board. In order to strengthen OCCS' internal capacity and allow the Executive Director to accept these opportunities to impact charter school and sponsor quality at a larger level, our board created a new position of Associate Executive Director and we are pleased to have Lenny Schafer step into that role. Leadership requires that we adapt in response to changing circumstances, and set up a plan for future success.

Leadership goes hand in hand with innovation, one of the underlying justifications for the entire charter school movement. OCCS is leading the way opening innovative new start-ups across the state. Our new schools remind me of the reason I do this work every day: each of them adheres to a unique model designed to reach a *specific student population in need*. Two of them are statewide virtual schools; three are college preparatory, “no-excuses” academies, one is a bilingual school, and three represent a new twist on STEM (“STEAM” – which is STEM plus arts programming). There is simply no room in education for cookie-cutter solutions.

The rest of our sponsored schools continue to find ways to innovate in the face of increasing expectations that make it even more challenging to score well on the state report cards. OCCS hopes to continue to lead, and innovate, not only because this is a new vision laid out by our board and staff, but because that is what we see so many hard-working principals, teachers, and students doing every day.

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schools, this year's new e-schools had to undergo evaluation and approval by the Ohio Department of Education. The application focused on the sponsor's and operator's academic track record, as well as the online school experience of both the sponsor and operator. OCCS is proud that both the management companies of Mosaica Online Academy (Mosaica Education) and Provost Academy (EdisonLearning, Inc.) and its own staff were recognized for a solid track record in virtual schooling.

Among the other nine start-ups this year are three STEAM Academies (STEAM Academy of Dayton, STEAM Academy of Cincinnati, STEAM Academy of Warrensville Heights), charter schools also operated by Mosaica and known for the company's trademarked Paragon curriculum. STEAM is an extension of “STEM,” (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), with the addition of “Arts” programming. Three I CAN Schools were also added to OCCS' portfolio: Ohio Collegiate Academy, Canton College Preparatory, and Akron Preparatory School. I CAN Schools is a management company that operates schools in Northeast Ohio with a college-preparatory focus. Finally, we are excited to sponsor our first bilingual school, Dayton SMART Academy (operated by Mangen and Associates).



*(from left to right) Gene Eidelman, Co-founder and President of Mosaica Education, and Frank Stoy, OCCS Director of Contracts and Operational Support*



*(from left to right) Keenan Bishop, Executive Director, Akron & Canton Preparatory Schools, Brian Hairston, Principal of Akron Preparatory Academy, and Lenny Schafer, Associate Executive Director of OCCS*



# OHIO'S NEW REPORT CARDS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE

This fall marked the release of new local report cards for Ohio's districts and schools. It also marks the beginning of a new era in accountability and academic rigor for Ohio students. For the past few years, the state of Ohio has done much to step up its educational game, with its Race to the Top application, transition to new Common Core standards and accompanying assessments, and overhaul of the report card system.

Passed into law last December, HB 555 put a plan in place to increase the scope and rigor of Ohio's grades for schools. These heightened expectations for schools have begun to address Ohio's issue of "grade inflation" (where the vast majority of districts received high marks, and an "A" or "B" essentially lost its meaning) and rally schools, educators, students, and communities toward greater rigor for all students.

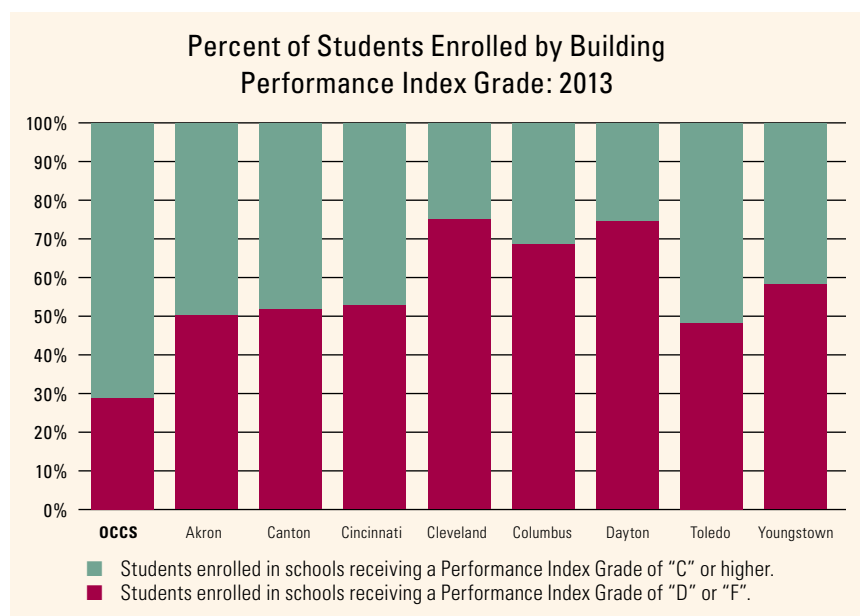
This year's report card graded districts and schools in nine areas, including how students perform on state assessments, how much progress students make in a given school year, high school graduation rates, and progress toward closing gaps in achievement among student subgroups. More metrics will be added next year, and by 2015 schools will receive an overall letter grade. For now, schools are analyzing the new metrics and preparing for the full roll-out of the new standards and assessments.

OCCS works with its sponsored schools to set individualized performance goals, which are embedded in our contracts with each school's governing authority. First and foremost, we seek to ensure that each school's educational program is a success. We monitor this expectation by asking if students are reading, doing math, writing, and achieving in other subjects on grade level. We also expect schools to make ongoing academic gains. This year, many schools – including charter schools – saw grades plummet, not necessarily because schools or students were truly doing worse, but because the bar was set higher. This is true for all public schools statewide and especially those located in the Urban 8 (Ohio's largest eight cities) serving our most disadvantaged students. No district in the state received "straight As" on the report card, not even the previously high-performing ones.

Recent changes to Ohio's accountability system enable OCCS to better focus on what works in schools and how we can collaborate with our partners so that ALL of our schools can improve. The next few years offer a rare opportunity to ask the educational community and ourselves how we can do better so that we can do right by kids. Even our highest performing schools have room to grow. Are we serving students with disabilities to the highest level possible? What about gifted students, and previously untested students in grades K-2? Are we closing achievement gaps among groups of students such as those who are economically disadvantaged or whose primary language is not English?

Over the last several years, OCCS has seen performance and growth trends go up within its portfolio. Overall, we recognize that the road ahead is an arduous one. As a sponsor, we must continue to insist on quality, make tough choices about schools that are under-performing, and provide technical assistance and support to schools that need it. At the same time, it's important to celebrate our successes and highlight the work of schools that have made big gains. Here are trends worth noting from the 2012-13 school year:

- 18 OCCS-sponsored schools received higher Performance Index Scores (PIS, a weighted average of students' achievement in tested grades and subjects) in 2013, among those receiving a PIS in 2012. Four OCCS-sponsored schools increased their PIS by at least five points, a significant jump considering the scale for PIS is 0-120.
- Columbus Preparatory Academy's PIS of 112.9 made it the highest achieving charter school in Ohio and the ninth highest performing public school in the state.
- 40 percent of OCCS-sponsored schools receiving value-added results were rated as an "A" – this means that students enrolled in these schools exceeded a year's worth of growth during their previous academic year.
- Over 70 percent of the 26,000+ students enrolled in OCCS-sponsored schools during 2012-13 were enrolled in a school receiving a PIS grade of "C" or higher, outperforming Ohio's 8 largest urban districts (graph below).





## OCCS Executive Director takes helm of statewide sponsor association

**D**r. Darlene Chambers was recently elected as President of the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA), Ohio's trade association for charter school authorizers (aka sponsors). OACSA's mission is to promote sponsor excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency to create and maintain high-quality community schools through quality oversight and support. Its members collectively sponsor schools attended by nearly two-thirds of Ohio's charter school population.

Dr. Chambers said of her new post, "I look forward to OACSA continuing to play a pivotal role in statewide issues and policies affecting sponsors. Last year, our group was heavily involved in both the Cleveland Plan and work done by the Transformation Alliance, and the workgroup headed up by the Ohio Department of Education to launch pilots of the new sponsor evaluation system. OACSA's sponsor leaders collectively have decades of experience in the movement, and aim to continue to make quality improvements in all of our schools while preserving the essential autonomy and innovation that is the hallmark of the choice movement. I look forward to leading the group through whatever issues arise over the coming year."



## OCCS names new Associate Executive Director

The Ohio Council of Community Schools (OCCS) is pleased to announce that Lenny Schafer has been promoted to Associate Executive Director.

"I am extremely excited and humbled to serve the 30,000+ students in OCCS' portfolio in this capacity. I am really looking forward to this opportunity," Lenny said.

Prior to this position, Lenny was the Senior Director of External Oversight, responsible for overseeing the regional representatives and generating, analyzing, coordinating and overseeing compliance field operations and protocols. Lenny has spent 15 plus years working in education as a counselor, teacher, and administrator. Lenny holds a Masters of Education in Counseling and is an independently licensed professional clinical counselor. In addition, he is a founding member of two dropout recovery high schools in Canton, Ohio.

"Lenny's unwavering leadership in the charter school movement, and years of experience working on behalf of choice for all families and students, are assets to our organization and the movement at large. Lenny is also a firm proponent of the power of strategic partnerships and working together with all of our partners to ensure equal access to quality education," Executive Director, Dr. Darlene Chambers, said.

In his new position, Lenny will be leading the new school development team, which guides potential new charter schools through the application process. He also oversees several OCCS departments – academics, special education, and compliance – and together with the Executive Director makes strategic operational decisions on behalf of OCCS to ensure greater quality, accountability, and innovation for the organization and its sponsored schools.

Darrin Beconder was promoted to Director of Regional Representation, and will work directly with OCCS' regional representatives.



*(from left to right) Erica Pharis, School Leader of Kids Unlimited Academy, Bill Geha, Prevention Service Coordinator for Sylvania District Schools and Officer Sara Shaw, Oregon Police Department*

## KUA teacher speaks up against bullying at town hall meeting

**Kids Unlimited Academy's** (KUA) School Leader, Erica Pharis, participated on a panel of administrators and local law enforcement at WTGE Public Media in Toledo as part of an event to prevent bullying and make a safe environment for all students. "The Bully Project," a documentary following five people whose lives have been affected by bullying, was shown on August 6th, followed by a town hall meeting and panel discussion on how to handle the issues addressed in the film.

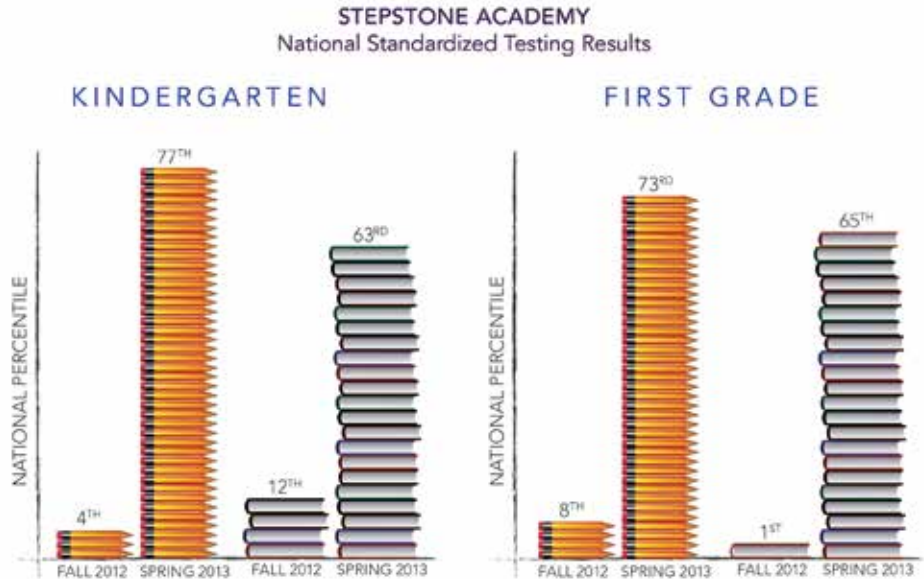
## Central Academy wins two grants to improve school safety

**C**entral Academy of Ohio (CAO) recently received two grants to improve school safety. CAO received the first award for a MARCS Emergency Communication System which will allow the school to contact all first responders immediately in case of an emergency in the building. This provides a faster way to contact the appropriate services in the event of a crisis and saves the school approximately \$2000. The second grant from the Ohio Schools Facility Commission will allow CAO to replace the school's front doors and install remote access for the inner doors before entering the school. CAO applied for these grants as part of its goal is to increase the safety and security of its students.



## Stepstone Academy makes significant academic gains

**Stepstone Academy**, a K-1 Cleveland charter school that opened in 2012, demonstrated tremendous academic growth this past year. Stepstone students made remarkable gains in both math and reading as compared to other urban students with the same initial math and reading levels. The school finished in the 92nd percentile or above for fall-to-spring academic gains in all grade levels and subjects, while comparable schools ranked in the 45th-48th percentile. Students were tested using the nationally recognized Northwest Education Assessment (NWEA), which shows academic growth made from fall-to-spring in both kindergarten and 1st grade reading and math. The graphs to the right illustrate how much Stepstone kindergarteners and first graders advanced over the course of the year in both reading and math.



*Richard Paul presenting to Toledo Prep and Fitness students*

## Toledo Prep and Fitness hosts Duck Sense Bully Prevention

This month, **Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy** hosted an anti-bullying event, Duck Sense Bully Prevention, in which award winning school speaker, bully prevention expert and curriculum author, Richard Paul, presented a school assembly program promoting respect, responsibility and safe schools. Val Sandy, School Leader at Toledo Preparatory and Fitness said, "By having Richard Paul present his Bully Program it brings together what the teachers have been working on in and out of their classrooms. The bullying program helps the students understand what bullying is in a fun, interactive way by using the puppets."

## OCCS announces NEW SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY GRANT WINNERS

The Ohio Council of Community Schools (OCCS) is pleased to have recently awarded \$100,000 in grants to 10 charter schools for its second annual New School Technology Grant. New charter schools, either opening this year or new to OCCS sponsorship, were eligible for the award.

These one-time grants were awarded as an extension of OCCS' commitment to empower schools to begin operations and a partnership on solid financial ground. Each school outlined in its application how technology funding would improve student achievement, help develop 21st century skills, and support pedagogical strategies.

### The following schools received an award:

Akron Preparatory School	Ohio Collegiate Academy
Canton College Preparatory School	Provost Academy Ohio
Dayton SMART Elementary School	STEAM Academy of Cincinnati
The Knight Academy	STEAM Academy of Dayton
Mosaica Online of Ohio	STEAM Academy of Warrensville Heights

Executive Director of OCCS, Dr. Darlene Chambers, said of the technology grant, "OCCS believes in the power of technology and innovation to help schools reach all learners. Though charter schools have more freedom to implement innovative programs than district schools often do, they typically don't have as many funds to make this possible. The new school technology grant attempts to help bridge this divide. We are excited to see what our schools accomplish with the grant funds."



# OCCS announces SIXTH ANNUAL STUDENT

**F**or the past six years, OCCS has awarded scholarships to students who attended a charter school in Ohio and who plan to pursue postsecondary education. These awards are an extension of our commitment to ensuring that all students have opportunities for education and training after high school, and an acknowledgement of the financial burdens it can impose on many of our students and families. This fall, OCCS awarded over \$60,000 in scholarships to 19 students. All students in Ohio who have attended a charter school were eligible, not just students among OCCS' portfolio schools. Applicants were chosen based on achievements in academics, leadership, and service.

## *Congratulations to this year's scholarship winners!*

### **OCCS/UT College Scholarship**

*For students attending University of Toledo*

**John Kreuz** – (Ohio Virtual Academy)

**Margaret Kreuz** – (Ohio Virtual Academy)

**William Kreuz** – (Ohio Virtual Academy)

**Destin Martin** – (Toledo Preparatory Academy)

**Cameron Terrell** – (Toledo Preparatory Academy)



Margaret Kreuz



William Kreuz



Destin Martin

### **OCCS Continuing Education Scholarship**

*For students attending a two-year college in Ohio*

**Niaisha Duncan** – Cincinnati State Community College  
(Mount Auburn International Academy)

**Taylor Dunnings** – Cuyahoga Community College  
(Nexus Academy of Cleveland)

**Anne Renouf** – Columbus State Community College  
(Ohio Virtual Academy)



Taylor Dunnings



Anne Renouf

*These awards are an extension of our commitment to ensuring after high school, and an acknowledgement of the financial*



# SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

## OCCS University Scholarship

*For students attending a four-year college in Ohio*

**Zhané Cervantes** – Ohio Northern University (*The Charles School*)

**Rita DeRaedt** – Bowling Green State University (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Tyler Honaker** – Ohio Dominican University (*Summit Academy Columbus*)

**Janel Mathews** – Youngstown State University (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Jesse Sockman** – Malone University (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Daniel Straiton** – Ohio State University (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Benjamin Taylor** – The College of Wooster (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Tobechi Titus** – Capital University (*The Charles School*)

**Carmen Watson-Stuckey** – Wilmington College (*Middletown Preparatory and Fitness Academy*)

**Megan Wittman** – Ohio University (*Ohio Virtual Academy*)

**Pearline Young** – Kent State University (*Horizon Science Academy – Toledo*)



Zhané Cervantes



Rita DeRaedt



Tyler Honaker



Janel Mathews



Jesse Sockman



Daniel Straiton



Benjamin Taylor



Tobechi Titus



Megan Wittman



Pearline Young

*that all students have opportunities for education and training burdens it can impose on many of our students and families.*



### CPA ranks #1 charter school in state

Columbus Preparatory Academy (CPA) received the number one Performance Index Score among charter schools in the state, according to the 2012-13 local report cards. Scoring a 112.9 (out of a possible 120), CPA’s “no excuses” teaching model exemplifies that regardless of zip code, all students can receive a high-quality education. Over half (54 percent) of CPA’s student population is economically disadvantaged.



CPA students celebrate their PIS of 112.9 with an assembly



(from left to right) Chad Carr, Executive Vice President of Mosaica Education and School Leader of CPA, Dawn Eidelman, Co-founder & Chief Education Officer of Mosaica Education, Ron Adler of Ohio Coalition for Quality Education, Todd Burger, OCCS Regional Representative, and three CPA students



### CPA and Toledo Prep and Fitness named ODE Schools of Promise

Congratulations to **Columbus Preparatory Academy** and **Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy** for being recognized by the Ohio Department of Education as “Schools of Promise.” ODE honored 141 schools with the award, which recognizes schools that attain solid student achievement in reading and mathematics despite serving a significant number of economically disadvantaged students.



photo credit: Ed Suba Jr./Akron Beacon Journal

### I CAN Schools featured in local media

**Akron Preparatory School** and **Canton College Preparatory School**, new charter schools operated by I CAN SCHOOLS and sponsored by OCCS, were recently featured in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. Marshall Emerson III, co-founder of I CAN SCHOOLS, told the *Akron Beacon Journal* that he believes that structure can lead to a better education for the children his schools teach.



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If you have school or student success stories you’d like to feature in an upcoming OCCS newsletter, please email them to [jamie@ohioschools.org](mailto:jamie@ohioschools.org)